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Dr. Gridlock

Manufacturer agrees to stop using 'flushable' claim for wipes that utilities say clog sewer systems

By Katherine Shaver June 23 at 4:04 PM

Fewer personal wipes — the kind advertised as moistened toilet paper — soon might carry the “flushable” label.

The manufacturer for wipes sold under the Costco, CVS, Target and BJ's Wholesale Club labels has agreed to stop advertising them as “flushable” until it can prove they are safe to flush, a move hailed by utility officials nationwide who say the wipes clog sewer treatment systems.

The Federal Trade Commission's proposed consent order against Nice-Pak Products Inc. was reached as part of a settlement with the company in May. The 30-day public comment period on the proposed order ended June 19, and the FTC will now decide whether to make the order final.

The National Association of Clean Water Agencies has represented U.S. sewer agencies in discussions with wipes manufacturers since 2007.

[How Washington-area utilities say 'flushable' wipes are clogging sewer systems and costing money]

DC Water and the Washington Suburban Sanitary Commission (WSSC), which provides sewer services to Montgomery and Prince George's counties, say wipes clog sewer lines and break pumps because they don't break apart like toilet paper. The wipes also contribute to blockages that cause sewage to overflow into streams and back up into basements, utilities say.

WSSC officials say they have spent \$1.4 million to install grinders at sewage pumping stations, and DC Water has said it devotes hundreds of man-hours to removing stuck wipes and repairing broken equipment.

Katherine Shaver is a transportation and development reporter. She joined The Washington Post in 1997 and has covered crime, courts, education and local government but most prefers writing about how people get — or don't get — around the Washington region.